

Meeting Minutes

RED ROCK DESERT LEARNING CENTER CORE GROUP

Bureau of Land Management

Tuesday, March 15, 2005

The meeting commenced at 10:40 a.m. with the following persons in attendance:

Kathy August, Blaine Benedict, Bob Boyd, Paul Buck, Bill Cates, Ed Dodrill, Dale Etheridge, Nancy Flagg, Laurie Howard, Megan Iudice, Jeanne Klockow, Angie Lara, Richard Leifreid, Mark Morse, Helen Mortenson, Tim O'Brien, Alan O'Neill, Patrick Putnam, Jackson Ramsey, Linda Rolle, Michael Reiland, Henry Tom, Pat Williams, Debbie Wright, Billie Young.

1. Introductions

The group welcomed Ed Dodrill of the Southern Nevada Regional Trails Partnership and Linda Rolle, Clark County School District.

2. Mission Statement

Michael Reiland read aloud the mission statement of the RRDLC to remind the Core Group of its focus.

"To instill stewardship and respect by increasing knowledge and understanding of the Mojave Desert ecosystems and cultures through a unique experiential discovery program."

Angie Lara requested that the mission statement be printed at the bottom of each Core Group agenda.

3. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the January 18, 2005, meeting were approved with no changes.

4. Update on Core Curriculum

Jeanne Klockow, Education Curriculum Coordinator, presented an update on the timeline and process for completing the core curriculum for the Red Rock Desert Learning Center (*handouts on file with BLM and UNLV Public Lands Institute*). She reminded the committee of the actions that have occurred to date and then reviewed two potential schedules for either a four-day/three-night experience or a three-day/two-night experience to show how the science curriculum and core curriculum might work as a whole. The sample schedules were developed solely to test the logistics of moving 105 students through the campus at one time by breaking them down into smaller groups. All curriculum being developed for the RRDLC is based on an "essential questions" model, to get the students to think critically and scientifically.

Jeanne then distributed a timeline for developing the remainder of the core curriculum through the creation of 6 working groups. She invited the Core Group to volunteer to help develop various core topics or to identify others who might wish to help.

Angie Lara noted the curriculum will honor the mission of the school and the BLM's mission, but she wants to ensure that the knowledge translates back after a student leaves the school. Early discussions about this project with the congressional delegation centered on stewardship and balancing use of public lands with conservation. Angie is interested in seeing that the curriculum addresses real programs within the BLM – such as responsible mining, grazing, recreation,

development, fire management, etc. – so that students leave with an understanding of why these issues are important for long-term management of public lands.

Jeanne suggested that BLM specialists could be brought in as speakers, but she will also work with BLM staff to integrate and correlate these topics throughout the core curriculum as it is developed.

Angie asked for clarification on the daily schedules and whether one format would preclude the other. Jeanne noted the operator could do both throughout the year, or other combinations as well, to provide maximum flexibility in how the facility is used throughout the year in a way that best meets the needs of teachers and the operator. Michael noted the curriculum “menu concept” allows a one-day visit if desired by a teacher, although the principle intent is to create a multi-day desert immersion experience.

5. Update on Water Testing

Bob Boyd of BLM provided an update on the water testing that has been conducted at the RRDLC site. The U.S. Geologic Survey collected field data in the fall and conducted a pump test to determine if the rate of pumping to supply the school was sustainable and what impacts it might have on Blue Diamond and other areas. Bob distributed a copy of the USGS report (*on file with BLM and UNLV Public Lands Institute*), which documents the work that was conducted, locations, water levels, and pumping test data. A model was constructed to predict effects; with the predicted water usage at the RRDLC at 6 acre feet per year, the study indicates that over 50 years the draw-down on the aquifer would be only a couple inches. As a result, there should be no long-term effects on the town of Blue Diamond. Bob noted that some water quality sampling is still occurring. The nitrate level is pretty low and bacteria levels were all negative. The BLM is still waiting for a report on trace metals.

Bob also reported that BLM has been monitoring current water conditions at the site, given the very wet period Southern Nevada has experienced between November 2004 and February 2005. The spring at Oliver Ranch has been running at 700 gallons per minute, where in a typical year it runs at 5-10 gallons per minute. Discharges have been observed all through the property into Blue Diamond wash. The current water levels may affect the engineering of foundations for the RRDLC buildings. Last fall water levels were at 45-50 feet below surface; over the span of this winter, those levels are now at 5 feet below surface. There is no long-term monitoring data available for comparative analysis over other wet and dry seasons.

Alan O'Neill asked about BLM's water rights on the property. Bob responded that the agency has surface water rights on the springhead but no groundwater rights. A total of 15 acre-feet is needed for the school, campground, visitor center, and wild horse and burro facility. Michael Reiland reported on three options for securing ground water rights for the RRDLC: (1) buying rights within the Las Vegas valley and moving them there, (2) securing water rights as part of some other acquisition, or (3) getting water rights donated. Michael noted that \$150,000 has been set aside in the project budget to purchase water rights if necessary. Nancy Flagg asked how the three options might affect the project timeline. Michael said none of the options should affect the timeline. BLM is starting the process required to buy rights in case this becomes necessary and is also exploring a partnership with the state park for 15 acre feet. There is some interest in having the Fund-Raising and Partnerships Committee explore a donation from a developer or other third party. Committee chair Blaine Benedict asked what the estimated value would be. Bob Boyd responded that water rights are typically \$10,000-\$15,000 per acre foot. Blaine felt it might be more expedient to buy the rights rather than gamble on a donation that may not total match what is required.

Jackson Ramsey asked if changes at Bonnie Springs will affect the water rights, since some private land has apparently been sold for construction of approximately 15-17 homes. Bob noted the landowners will have to go through the same process to increase their water rights. Jackson asked if the addition of homes will affect the overall water levels in the area. Bob said that was not tested because the land sale was not known last fall when the USGS conducted its study. Angie asked if the current modeling is adequate for NEPA, given that cumulative effect is a factor. Bob said the number of homes that could be built should not be a problem. Jackson questioned whether the current study is enough to put the water questions to rest. He would prefer a definitive statement.

6. Standing Reports

A. Line and Space Architects

Henry Tom of Line and Space Architects presented a progress report. Schematic design is complete and was subjected to a value analysis (VA) in late January by an independent team that reviewed the designs. Henry reported this process was very productive. The evaluation team made 19 recommendations and another 20 design suggestions, which were then reviewed by the Building Committee and the architects. The committee's review resulted in 27 modifications and 9 additional strategies, which are reflected in the minutes of the committee's February 18, 2005, meeting. Overall, the estimated cost of the project was reduced from \$47 million to approximately \$37.7 million after cuts were made. Design development (creation of detailed architectural drawings) will now progress with the committee's decisions in mind. The VA team will conduct a second round of analysis at the end of the design development phase.

The architectural schedule has been updated to provide additional time for design development and construction. Henry noted many issues still need to be worked out before construction documents are issued. As a result, the timeline is very tentative. Some options include speeding up construction of the wild horse facility or phasing in utilities and infrastructure before the campus buildings are constructed.

Henry offered use of a Line and Space powerpoint presentation for public outreach, which visually presents the campus and buildings. The firm would like to create a script and then do a training session for those who might use it.

Kathy August asked if some cuts be added back in later if additional funding became available. Henry said it would depend on the timing of the decision and would have to occur during design development. She asked if Line and Space could rank the suggested cuts in terms of where a decision would be required in the timeline.

B. UNLV

Due to time concerns, Nancy Flagg deferred her report to the next meeting.

C. BLM

Michael Reiland had no specific issues to report but suggested the Core Group read the Building Committee minutes for information on two other outstanding issues related to parking and electrical power needs at the site. He asked if the Core Group wanted any other updates. Kathy August asked about the status of a statement of work for potential operators. Angie Lara reported that BLM is continuing to work through the agency's hierarchy to get the statement finalized, but

the task has been made more difficult with the loss of a contracting person at the state BLM office. Getting this issue settled is a high priority.

7. Committee Reports

There were no committee reports.

8. Open Discussion / New Business

Michael Reiland is requesting that every committee meet between now and the next Core Group meeting in May. He will give each group a list of tasks. Michael shared the current committee list and asked for additions and changes.

The next meeting of the RRDLC Core Group will be Tuesday, May 17, 2005, at the UNLV campus. Details will be sent at a later date.

Alan O'Neill reported that specialty Outside Las Vegas Foundation license plates are now available through the Department of Motor Vehicles. Proceeds support various SNPLMA initiatives like the RRDLC.

The meeting adjourned at 12:15 p.m.